

A Note from the Publisher

It seems hard to believe that I'm actually writing an editorial for MS. TREE! I have enjoyed writing this book for so long, it is a real treat to know that we'll be publishing it here at A-V.

As you are probably aware, this is our newest **monthly** title. You may wonder at the looks of the interior, but this new two-colour version of MS. TREE is something Max and Terry had mentioned to me from our first conversation regarding MS. TREE moving to A-V. Terry does the actual work for the separations himself, and the mood evoked by this process completely fits the story. The story "Deadline," of which this issue contains the first two chapters, will be running for either four or five issues. A-V has always allowed as much creative room as possible, so we aren't going to pin Max down any further than that. I've heard all too often of how a character or a story just begins to assume new importance, and the story-line seems to expand all on its own.

We are also publishing a reprint book of the introductory stories of Michael Tree, the form for FILES of MS. TREE will be much the same as for SWORDS of CEREBUS. It will be 130 pages of story, covering the first two major MS. TREE stories, "I, for an Eye" (which appeared in the black & white Eclipse Magazine, issues #1-6), the original story for our heroine and "Death, Do Us Part" (which appeared in colour in MS. TREE #1-3). There is also an all new text story by Max, with illustrations by Terry. If you've ever wondered how MS. TREE would have looked in the old pulp magazines, here's your chance.

Our orders on both FILES of MS. TREE and MS. TREE have met with our expectations. It is always a worry, when changing publishers, that you will lose some readers along the way. It seems our worry was misplaced, for not only were sales good, but Max told me that he met quite a few fans at this year's Chicago Con. A-V readers who would begin with MS. TREE #10, and that a large majority of them were women! Personally, I hope that the female readers will sit down and tell Max and Terry why they like MS. TREE and let them know how they see her. Having two men do a book with a woman as the main character is unusual enough. To have it be the kind of book that women like to read as well, is a big bonus to them. I know they'd like to hear your opinions. As you may be aware, Max and Terry are also doing a cross-over book with First Comics called **P.I.'s**. The project is the kind of fun thing I'd like to see more of in comics. I enjoy First's line of books and am happy to recommend that you pick up a copy of **P.I.'s** when it comes out this September. The story, which features Michael teaming up with Mike Mauser (from E-MAN) takes place chronologically between MS. TREE #9 and MS. TREE #10. It centers around comic collecting and the three-issue mini-series culminates at a comic book convention. Needless to say, Max and Terry are really excited about working with Joe Staton. Wouldn't it be fun to do a cross-over of this nature once a year? What would you like to see?

Besides Max and Terry, there is another very talented man working on this book. His name is Gary Kato and he lives in exotic Hawaii, Honolulu, in fact. (Now there's a city to have an A-V conference in!) Gary helps Terry by doing the lettering and the backgrounds on MS. TREE, as well as doing full pencils on the Mike Mist stories. Naturally the book would feel incomplete without his hand in there.

So, that completes my introduction to the newest members of the Aardvark-Vanaheim clan. I know you're going to enjoy following Michael's adventures in the years to come. See you next month for news on behind the scenes plans for other projects that Max, Terry and Gary have planned.

Deni

Ms. TREE

NO. 10

AUGUST 1984

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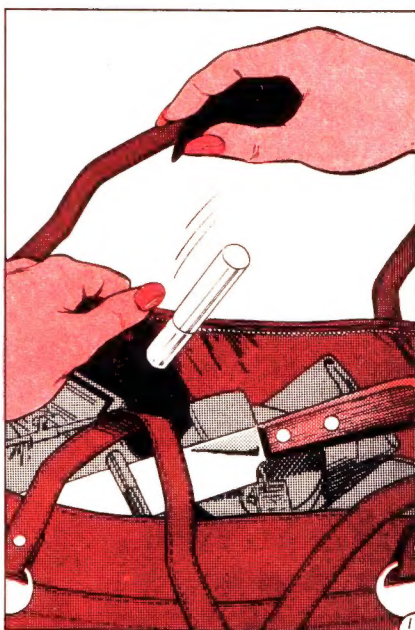
Max Collins and Terry Beatty's

M. TREE™



Beatty

"BLACK and WHITE and RED ALL OVER"



WHAT HAPPENED
TO THAT SWEET
YOUNG THING YOU
WERE TALKIN' AT ?

DON'T KNOW —
SHE WANDERED
OFF TO THE
POWDER ROOM
AND NEVER
CAME BACK.

CHUCKIE, CHUCKIE,
CHUCKIE — YOU JUST
DON'T COME ON
STRONG ENOUGH.
WOMEN THESE DAYS
AREN'T **SHY**, Y'KNOW.

LAY OFF, VINCE —
I GOTTA
TAKE THINGS
AT MY
OWN PACE.

LOOK AFTER CINDY, HERE,
TILL I GET BACK,
GOOD BUDDY — GOT TO
HIT THE LITTLE BOY'S
ROOM M'SELF.

TRY AND
NOT
FALL IN.

WELL, WELL, WELL — WE THOUGHT
YOU WENT AND DISAPPEARED ON US.
YOU'RE BREAKIN' CHUCKIE'S
LITTLE HEART Y'KNOW....

GENTLEMEN

MAYBE I LIKE
YOU
BETTER.

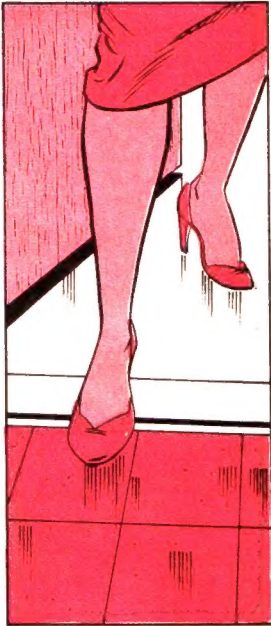
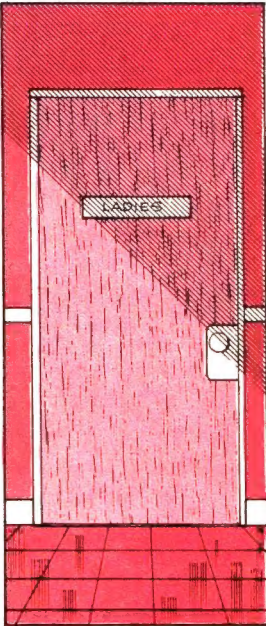
WELL, UH — YOU OBVIOUSLY
GOT GREAT TASTE, BABE —
MAYBE WE COULDS LIP
OUTA HERE, AND FIND
SOME QUIET SPOT —

THERE'S A LOCK
ON THE INSIDE OF
THE LADIES ROOM
DOOR....

COME ON, LOVER —
THIS IS YOUR
LUCKY DAY.



LADIES



I DON'T KNOW
ABOUT THAT GUY —
HE *SAYS* IT'S JUST
A COLD SORE, BUT...

REST
ROOMS



MEN ARE FULL
OF SURPRISES
— ALL *BAD* !



Ms. **TREE**

"DEADLINE"

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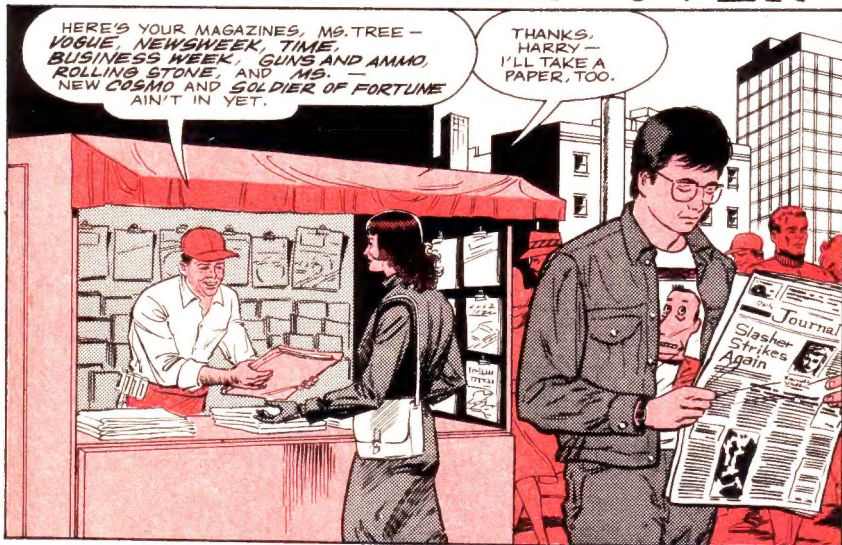
by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

Chapter One

BLACK AND WHITE AND **RED** ALL OVER

HERE'S YOUR MAGAZINES, MS. TREE —
VOGUE, *NEWSWEEK*, *TIME*,
BUSINESS WEEK, *GUNS AND AMMO*,
ROLLING STONE, AND *MS.* —
NEW *COSMO* AND *SOLDIER OF FORTUNE*
AIN'T IN YET.

THANKS,
HARRY —
I'LL TAKE A
PAPER, TOO.



SEE WHERE THE
"SINGLES SLASHER"
IS UP TO VICTIM
LUCKY-NUMBER
SEVEN?

FIRST I
HEARD ABOUT
IT — BUT I'M
SURE THE
JOURNAL
WON'T SPARE ME
THE GORY DETAILS.

THE SLASHER'S ON
EVERYBODY'S MIND,
Y'KNOW — CITY'S IN
A REG'LAR STATE
OF PANIC — GOOD FOR
BUSINESS, THOUGH.

SHOULD BE,
WITH SIX
MONTHS OF
HEADLINES
LIKE THESE —



ART ASSIST AND LETTERING: GARY KATO

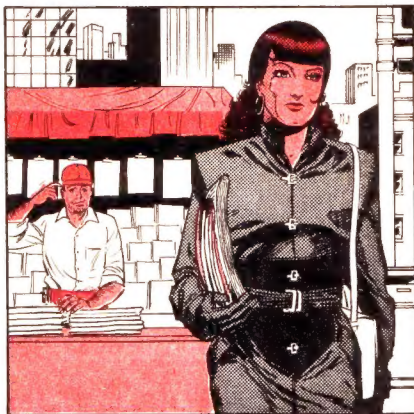
"FUNNY AIN'T IT, MS. TREE — A CITY THIS SIZE, SEVEN DEATHS OVER SIX MONTHS — IT AIN'T NO BIG DEAL. NOT IF YOU PUT IT IN PERSPECTIVE, LIKE."



SEVEN KILLINGS OUTA MILLIONS OF PEOPLE — THAT'S JUST A DROP IN THE LITTLE OL' BUCKET.



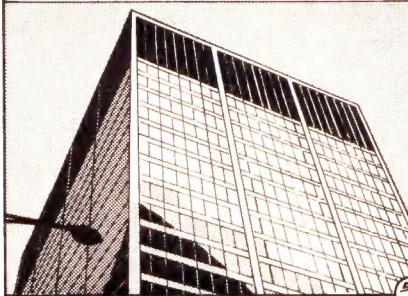
NOT IF YOU'RE THE GUY KICKING IT, HARRY.



IT WAS NICE TO HAVE SOMEBODY BESIDES ME IN THE HEADLINES, THESE DAYS — EVEN IF IT WAS SOME LATTERDAY URBAN JACK THE RIPPER.



MY LIFE HAD STARTED TO SETTLE DOWN AGAIN, AT LAST — MY AGENCY HAD RELOCATED IN AN EXPENSIVE, EXCLUSIVE LOOP LOCATION (OUT OF NECESSITY, AS OUR PREVIOUS OFFICES HAD BEEN BLOWN UP ON US).



BUT BUSINESS ALSO JUSTIFIED THE MOVE — BUSINESS WAS GOOD. LIKE HARRY'S NEWSTAND HEADLINES HAD IMPROVED MY CASH FLOW.



WE WERE, HOWEVER, SHORT-STAFFED. I WAS USING MIKE MIST'S SMALL ONE-MAN AGENCY TO TIDE US OVER, TILL OUR YOUNGEST MEMBER-OF-THE-FIRM, DAN GREEN — RECUPERATING FROM SEVERE BURNS INCURRED IN THAT OFFICE EXPLOSION — WAS BACK WITH US.



FOR NOW, THERE WAS SIMPLY THE FOUR OF US — OUR RECEPTIONIST DIANE, MY PERSONAL SECRETARY, EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT EFFIE, MY PARTNER ROGER, AND YOURS TRULY, MICHAEL TREE.



ROGER FREEMONT WAS MY LATE HUSBAND'S MOST TRUSTED ASSOCIATE — THEIR RELATIONSHIP DATED BACK TO VIETNAM; ROGER WAS EASILY THE BEST INVESTIGATOR IN THE FIRM — HELL, IN THE CITY.



HARGIS! WHAT DOES THAT MUCKRAKING SON-OF-A-BITCH WANT WITH ME!?



YOU'RE JUST AS CHARMING AS EVER, MS. TREE — AND TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTION — I WANT TO MAKE YOU A VERY WEALTHY WOMAN —

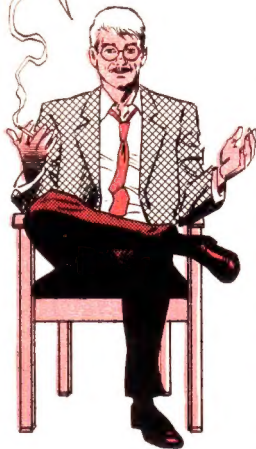
AND HELP YOU FIGHT THE GOOD FIGHT, AT THE SAME TIME... WHICH IS TO SAY, MAKE LIFE UNCOMFORTABLE FOR A CERTAIN FEW MOB BASTARDS.

WHY DON'T YOU JOIN ME — IT'S YOUR OFFICE, AFTER ALL....

YOU DON'T MIND IF I SIT BEHIND MY OWN DESK, DO YOU, HARGIS?

NOT AT ALL. YOU'RE THE BOSS. I JUST HAPPEN TO THINK WE'RE ON THE SAME SIDE — IT CRUSHES ME THAT YOU STILL HOLD ME IN SUCH CONTINUED LOW REGARD.

TELL THAT TO YOUR READERS. I ONLY BUY THE JOURNAL TO FOLLOW THE CRIME REPORTING, WHICH IS ACCURATE IF LURID — YOUR COLUMN, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS THE SORT OF YELLOW JOURNALISM THAT SHOULD'VE GONE OUT WITH CITIZEN HEARST.



I'M SURPRISED AT YOU — MY COLUMNS DEALING WITH YOUR WAR ON THE MOB MADE YOU OUT A **HEROINE** — LOOK AT YOUR FANCY NEW OFFICE. YOUR BUSINESS IS BOOMING, THANKS TO THE **JOURNAL** AND ME!



EVERY SELF-RESPECTING REPORTER ON THE **JOURNAL** JUMPED SHIP WHEN THAT ENGLISHMAN BOUGHT THE PAPER OUT — BUT YOU, **YOU** STAYED ON, CONTENT TO WALLOW IN MERTON RUDOLPH'S SENSATIONALISM!



MY COLUMNS ON YOU WERE **ACCURATE**, WEREN'T THEY? THEY'D'VE BEEN EVEN BETTER IF YOU'D GRANTED ME AN INTERVIEW—



WE'VE BEEN ALL THROUGH THIS BEFORE, HARGIS —



" BESIDES, MY STORY IS **OLD NEWS** — I LEFT THE MUERTA CASE TO THE COPS. "



"AND WHAT GOOD DID THAT DO YOU? " HARGIS SAID. " MUERTA SKIPPED THE COUNTRY, AND THE MOB'S DOING BUSINESS OUT OF THE SAME OLD STAND — "



DO YOU **DENY** YOU STILL GOT A **SCORE** TO SETTLE ?

OFF THE RECORD, NO.
ON THE RECORD, YES.

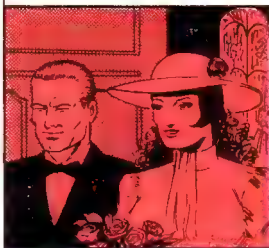


LOOK - I'M GOING TO
LEVEL WITH YOU -
I'M DOING YOUR STORY,
WITH OR WITHOUT YOUR
HELP -



"WHAT DO YOU MEAN,
HARGIS?"

"I MEAN I'M WRITING A
BOOK ABOUT YOU, SUGAR
- STARTING WITH
MICHAEL FRIDAY, SECRET-
ARY, MARRYING HER
PRIVATE-EYE BOSS,
MIKE TREE -"



"AND HIS **MURDER** ON
YOUR HONEYMOON NIGHT -"



"EVEN WITHOUT YOUR HELP, I HAVE
MOST OF THE STORY - HOW YOU CAUGHT
UP WITH THE MAN WHO BETRAYED YOUR
HUSBAND TO THE MOB - A MAN WHO
HAD BEEN YOUR HUSBAND'S PARTNER
ON THE POLICE FORCE -
LT. CHICK STEELE -"



I'LL ADMIT I'M
BEGINNING TO WISH I'D
KILLED THAT LYING
BASTARD - HE'S TURNED
STATE'S EVIDENCE,
YOU KNOW.



SURE -
THE WHOLE NINE YARDS
- WITNESS RELOCATION,
NEW FACE, NEW NAME,
NEW LIFE. ALL FOR HIS
HELP IN A CASE THAT
MAY NEVER GO TO
TRIAL, 'CAUSE
MUERTA **SKIPPED** -



"I SHOULD'VE KILLED HIM, TOO,"
I SAID, "WHEN I HAD THE
CHANCE - **DOMINIC MUERTA** -
MOB BOSS OF BOSSSES - A PITIFUL
EXCUSE FOR A HUMAN BEING -"





THE MIKE MIST™

MINUTE MYSTERIES

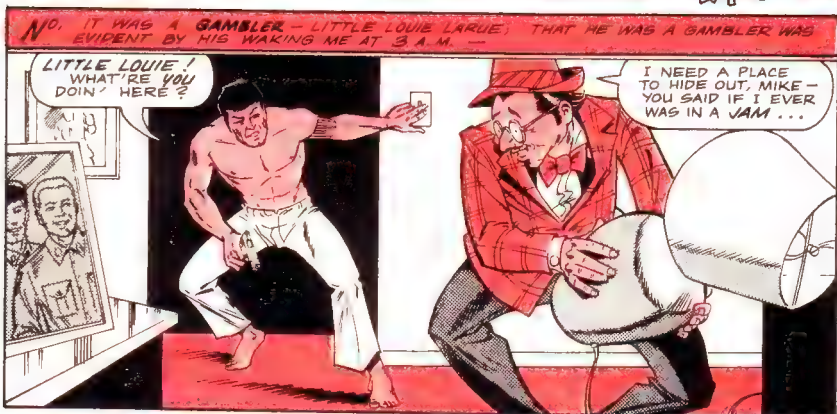
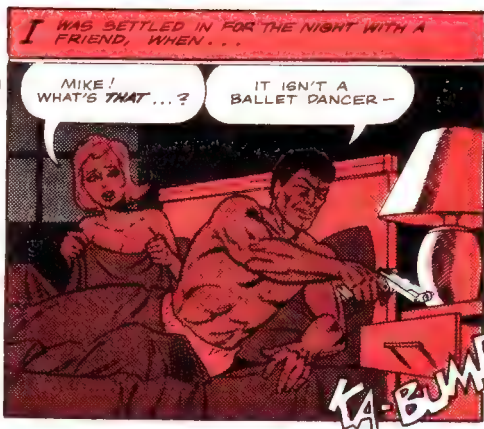


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MAX COLLINS and TERRY BEATTY

PENCILS by GARY KATO

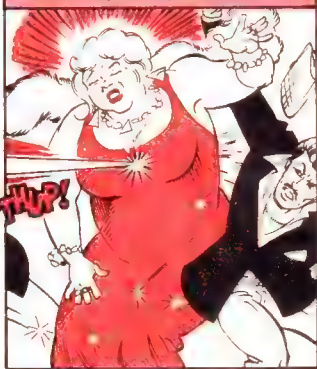
"LONG and the SHORT of DEATH"



"SHE WAS COMIN' OUT OF HER FAVORITE NIGHT SPOT, WITH A HUNKY BODYGUARD ON EITHER ARM —"



"— WHEN FROM OUT OF THE CROWD CAME A SHOT — A SILENCED SHOT, I GUESS —"



"ONE OF THE HUNKS SPOTTED ME IN THE CROWD — AND SHOUTED —"

IT'S LITTLE LOUIE! GRAB HIM!



I PANICKED AND RAN — I OWED THAT SIX-AND-A-HALF FOOT SIDE OF BEEF TEN GRAND, Y'KNOW —



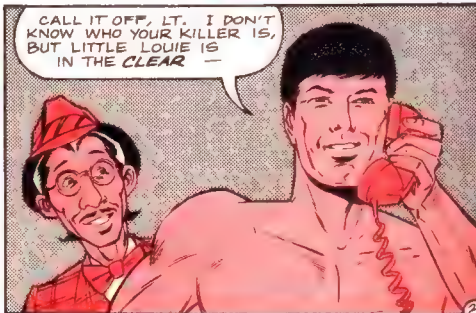
I NEED TO MAKE A CALL TO DIMM, LOUIE — I PROMISE I WON'T GIVE YOU AWAY —



YEAH, MIKE, BIG BERTHA'S CROAKED ALL RIGHT — STRAIGHT THROUGH THE HEART WITH A .38. WE GOT AN APB. OUT ON LITTLE LOUIE...



CALL IT OFF, LT. I DON'T KNOW WHO YOUR KILLER IS, BUT LITTLE LOUIE IS IN THE CLEAR —



HOW COULD DIMINUTIVE LOUIE HAVE SHOT SIX-FOOT-FIVE BERTHA "STRAIGHT THROUGH THE HEART"? IF HE HAD FIRED FROM THE GROUND, ON THE SAME LEVEL AS BERTHA, THE RESULT WOULD BE DISTINCTLY UPWARD-ANGLED ENTRY/DEPARTURE WOUNDS.

Ms. TREE

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by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

"DEADLINE"

Chapter Two



**30.
IS
A
DANGEROUS
AGE,
SIDNEY**

YOU KNEW I
WAS COMIN'
SO YOU
BAKED
A CAKE.
HUH, HARGIS?

NOT EXACTLY, MS. TREE
— TODAY'S MY *BIRTHDAY*
— THE BIG THREE-OH.

HELP YOURSELF,
IF YOU LIKE.



AND IN NEWSPAPER
JARGON, — 30 —
MEANS "*THE END*,"
RIGHT?

RIGHT. ONLY I
ALWAYS HEARD LIFE
BEGINS AT 40 —
WHICH DON'T MEAN
A THING IN NEWS-
PAPER JARGON, SO I
AIN'T SWEATIN' IT.



I'D ALLOWED HARGIS TO TALK ME INTO
COMING DOWN WITH HIM TO THE
JOURNAL OFFICES, SO HE COULD
MORE EFFECTIVELY PRESENT HIS CASE.
HE HAD PHOTOS AND SUCH TO SHOW ME —
BUT, MOSTLY, I THINK, HE WANTED ME
OPERATING ON HIS TURF.

HARGIS WAS ENOUGH OF A HOT-SHOT
COLUMNIST TO RATE HIS OWN OFFICE —
OR, AT ANY RATE, CUBICLE —

STEP THIS WAY, MS. TREE — YOU'RE
ABOUT TO FIND OUT WHAT SEPARATES
THE INVESTIGATIVE REPORTER
FROM THE MERE *GUMSHOE* —



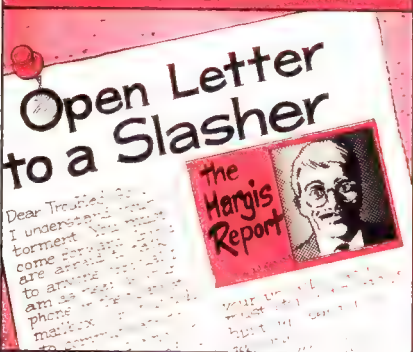
THIS WAS JUST ONE OF THOSE HAPPY ACCIDENTS, MG. TREE - I JUST HAPPENED TO BE WORKIN' ON THE "SINGLES SLASHER" STORY AT THE SAME TIME I WAS RESEARCHIN' YOU AND MUERTA, FOR OUR BOOK -



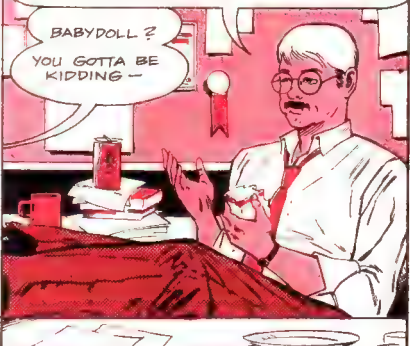
WE DON'T HAVE ANY BOOK JUST YET, HARGIS - AND I DON'T SEE WHERE YOUR COLUMNS ON THE SLASHER RATE AS ANY SORT OF "STORY" - IT'S JUST TYPICAL SENSATIONALIST CRAP -



APPEALS TO THE KILLER - "WRITE ME, CALL ME - I'LL BE YOUR FRIEND, YOUR VOICE - CHEAP-SHOT JOURNALISM AT ITS MOST CORNBALL."



YOUR FAITH IN ME IS CHOKIN' ME UP - OR IS IT THIS FROSTING? ANYWAY, THOSE COLUMNS ARE JUST THE TIP OF MY PULITZER-SIZE ICEBERG, BABYDOLL -



BABYDOLL?

YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING -

SO I'M A TEASE. BUT THIS I AIN'T KIDDIN' ABOUT: I'M GONNA BREAK THIS SLASHER DEAL WIDE OPEN - DIDN'T YOU READ MY LATEST "OPEN LETTER"?



"I HINTED TO THE KILLER THAT I KNOW THINGS ABOUT HER THAT NO ONE ELSE DOES."



HER? YOU'RE QUITE SURE THE SLASHER'S A WOMAN? THERE'VE BEEN NO EYE WITNESSES -



YOU **BET** I'M SURE IT'S A BROAD - **POSITIVELY** - HOW ELSE DO YOU SUPPOSE THESE GUYS'VE BEEN LURED OFF TO SOME SECLUDED PLACE FOR SLAUGHTER?



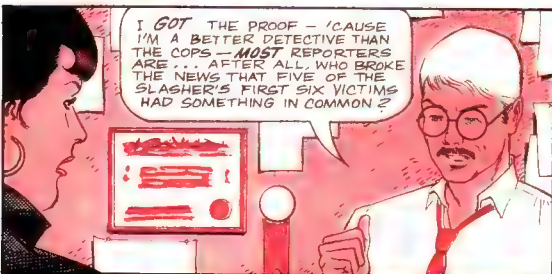
LIKE THE FIRST ONE - RECENT DVORCEE CLYDE WITHERS - POOR SCHMUCK HITS THE SINGLES SCENE FRIDAY NIGHT, FOUND IN THE ALLEY BEHIND A DISCO SATURDAY MORNING, DEADDER THAN POLYESTER.



THAT THEORY'S BEEN BANDIED ABOUT BY THE POLICE ALMOST SINCE **DAY ONE** - THAT THE SINGLES SLASHER MIGHT BE A JILL THE RIPPER. BUT THERE'S BEEN **NO PROOF** -



I **GOT** THE PROOF - 'CAUSE I'M A BETTER DETECTIVE THAN THE COPS - **MOST** REPORTERS ARE ... AFTER ALL, WHO BROKE THE NEWS THAT FIVE OF THE SLASHER'S FIRST SIX VICTIMS HAD SOMETHING IN COMMON?



YEAH, WELL SO DID I - SO WHAT? WESTWOOD'S A BIG SCHOOL, SERVING A LARGE, UPPER MIDDLE-CLASS AREA - AND ALL THE VICTIMS HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY AFFLUENT HABITUÉS OF THE SINGLES SCENE - NO GREAT COINCIDENCE THAT MOST OF 'EM WOULD HAVE WESTWOOD IN COMMON.



THAT THEY HAD, IN FACT, GONE TO THE SAME LOCA. HIGH SCHOOL BACK IN THE '60s - WESTWOOD.



WELL, I'LL TELL YOU *ONE* VICTIM WHO DIDN'T GO TO WESTWOOD HIGH IN HIS CHECKERED YOUTH — VINCENT CARBONE, LAST NIGHT'S VICTIM — #7.



"WHO WAS CARBONE?" I ASKED. "A MINOR COKE DEALER," HARGIS SAID.



"BUT PERHAPS I PAY MR. CARBONE A DISSERVICE," HARGIS SAID. "HE COULDN'T HAVE BEEN SO VERY MINOR IF HE WAS GOING TO TESTIFY AGAINST DOMINIC MUERTA —"



WHAT WAS HE GOING TO TESTIFY ABOUT?

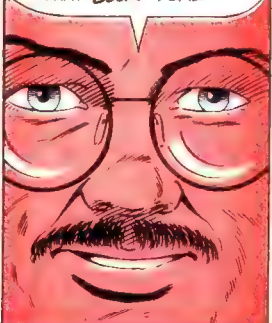


"THAT I DON'T KNOW — ASK YOUR PAL LT. VALER — AND MAYBE YOUR EX-PAL CAPTAIN MEYERS OF THE B. C. I. *"



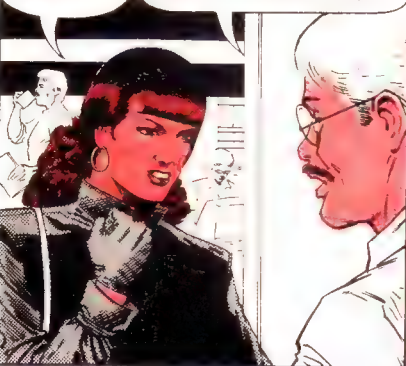
* STATE BUREAU OF CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION

THEN COME BACK AND TALK TO ME — I'LL FILL YOU IN... GIVE YOU EVERYTHING I'VE DUG UP ON MUERTA. BUT NOT TILL YOU AGREE TO THAT *BOOK* DEAL —

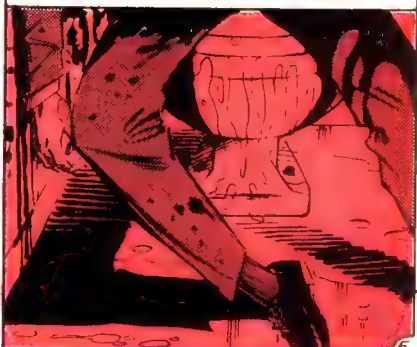


LISTEN, YOU LITTLE WEASEL —

YOU LISTEN, LADY — MUERTA'S OUT OF TOWN, BUT ONLY PHYSICALLY —



"I KNOW ENOUGH INSIDE DOPE ON *BOTH* THESE CASES TO BE CONVINCED LAST NIGHT'S KILLING WAS A *COPYCAT* — A HITMAN, OR HITWOMAN — DISGUISED A *CONTRACT KILL* —"

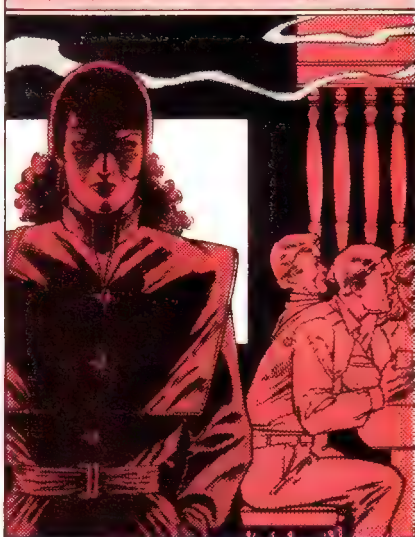


FUNNY HOW DREAM! THE OUTSIDE OF A NIGHTCLUB LOOKS IN THE LIGHT OF DAY — WITHOUT THE NEON AND THE NIGHT TO DO COSMETIC WONDERS.

Club-210



BUT INSIDE, THE CLUB COULD MAINTAIN ITS IMAGE. THANKS TO LOW-KEY LIGHTING — AND BUSINESS SEEMED GOOD, IF NOT BOOMING. LAST NIGHT'S DEATH-ON-THE-PREMISES MEANT LITTLE TO THIS AFTERNOON'S DRINKERS.



MICHAEL TREE:
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

LOOKING FOR YOU — HQ REFERRED ME HERE. SAID YOU WERE HAVING A LAST LOOK AROUND —



FRANKLY, I WAS SHOWING THE CRIME SCENE TO CAPTAIN MEYERS — YOU JUST MISSED HIM ... LUCKY FOR YOU. HE'D HAVE YOUR HEAD, IF —

IF HE KNEW I WAS SNEAKING AROUND IN MUERTA COUNTRY AGAIN?



THAT'S EXACTLY
RIGHT.
BUT HOW DID
YOU *KNOW*—

THAT CARBONE WAS
A SECRET PROSECUTION
WITNESS AGAINST
MUERTA?
THAT'S NOT IMPORTANT—

"WHAT *IS* IMPORTANT IS THAT I *DIDN'T*
KNOW TILL TODAY. WHY DIDN'T YOU
INFORM ME? I RISKED MY LIFE A
DOZEN TIMES PUTTING THE MUERTA
CASE TOGETHER FOR YOU 'PUBLIC SERVANTS'."



THAT TONE
ISN'T
CALLED FOR,
MICHAEL.

ISN'T IT, LT. VALER?
THEN WHY DO YOU HAVE
A SUDDENLY DEAD
WITNESS TO ADD TO THE
OVERFLOWING LIST OF
POLICE AND B. C. I.
SCREW-UPS?



MICHAEL, I...
DON'T KNOW
WHAT TO SAY —

YOU CAN START
WITH CARBONE —

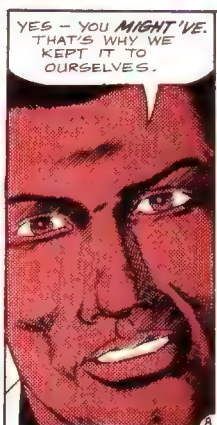
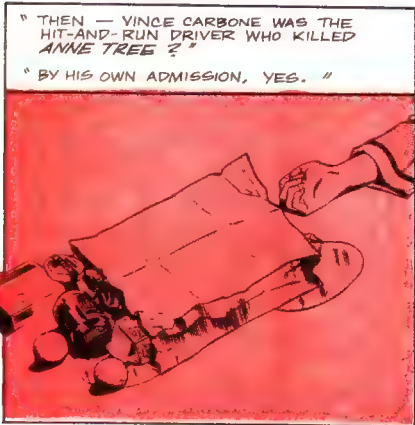
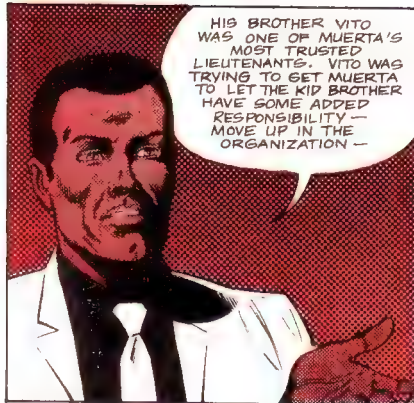
CARE TO JOIN ME IN
THE LADIES' LOUNGE?



CARBONE WAS A PROSPEROUS
BUT RELATIVELY SMALLTIME
DEALER — A CONNECTION
FOR THE SEEMING-STRAIGHT
CROWD. WALL STREET
TYPES LOOKING FOR A
NOSE-CANDY COFFEE BREAK
— THAT WAS HIS CLIENTELE.

SO HOW DID HE END UP KNOWING
ANYTHING THAT COULD'VE HURT
MUERTA IN COURT? MUERTA WAS
WELL-INSULATED FROM SUCH
SMALL FRY...





WELL, YOU DIDN'T NECESSARILY KEEP IT FROM THE MUERTA CAMP— YOU **ARE** CONSIDERING THAT POSSIBILITY AREN'T YOU?

THAT THIS IS A MOB HIT, USING THE SLASHER'S M.O. AS A COVER? YES.

LADIES

WHAT'S YOUR OPINION, RAFF?

TOO SOON TO HAVE ONE. BUT I DON'T LIKE COINCIDENCES...

I ALSO DON'T LIKE YOU IN THIS —

ME? I'M JUST ANOTHER HELPLESS SINGLE GIRL ADRIPT IN THE SINGLES SCENE, OFFICER — CIAO.

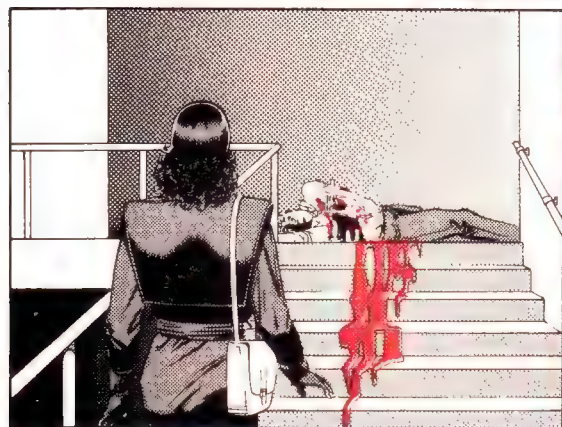
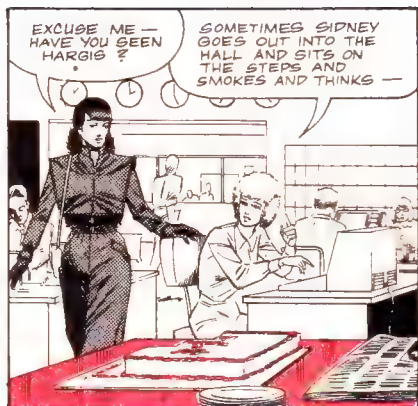
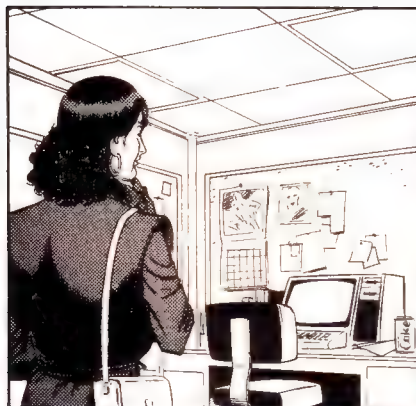


I'D MADE UP MY MIND TO GET INTO THIS — THE COPS HAD ALREADY LET TOO MUCH OF THE MUERTA CASE SLIP THROUGH THEIR FINGERS. AND I'D ALSO MADE UP MY MIND TO GIVE HARGIS WHAT HE WANTED.

LET HIM WRITE HIS SILLY BOOK ABOUT ME — I'D COOPERATE, I'D EVEN CO-BYLINE THE "THING" ANYTHING, TO GET HIS CONFIDENCE — AND HIS MUERTA FILES.

Daily Journal





saving that for issue 14 ..

I should point out, however, that planting pieces of what seem to be extraneous information in this series (when actually I'm planting the seeds for future stories) is a strategy I've been employing all along, in MS. TREE. I don't like series fiction that consists merely of random episodes strung together - I like series fiction that seems all of a piece, that is one long, unfolding novel, with stories growing out of stories. This has engendered a few complaints from readers about the domination of Dominic Muerta over the series so far: I can only say Muerta will continue, for a while at least, to cast his shadow over the proceedings; but not **all** continuities in the near future will be Muerta ones. Fair enough?)

Terry -

I wanted to write and tell you what a terrific job you and Collins are doing on MS. TREE. I was concerned that the art would suffer now that you have an assistant (Gary Kato), but the latest issue shows that this is not the case. Your styles mesh very well and the resulting art is as crisp and sharp as ever.

I hope that you, Max and Gary can continue your fine work on a monthly basis.

RICK BROOKS, San Antonio, TX

I'll answer this for Terry, since he's busy inking MS. TREE #11 at the moment. Terry and I are very pleased with Gary Kato's contribution to MS. TREE, and are especially pleased that he's come along for the A-V switch. I should point out, however, that the working arrangement has shifted a bit. Gary continues to work on the pencil stage of MS. TREE, though doing somewhat less than before (Terry is doing virtually all figure work, for example, as well as layouts). Gary is contributing most of the background pencils and, of course, his stylish lettering; on the other hand, he has taken over **complete** pencils on MIKE MIST. Also, occasionally Gary will do more-or-less complete pencils on MS. TREE (Terry reserving only the close-up panel pencils for himself) as certain deadline pressures require. The upcoming mini-series for First Comics will make this necessary, but with an artist as gifted as Gary Kato, we know the result will be a happy one.

Dear Max,

I've read each issue of MS. TREE as soon as it appeared on the stands. Yes, I do like it. However I have some misgivings.

Comics are still considered a children's medium, right? In the first few issues of MS. TREE we have seen a young married couple brutally and graphically murdered right in front of their little boy (the fact that this is actually only a dream doesn't lessen the impact), unmarried persons sleeping together, free use of profanity (including some salty language used by a child), God only knows how many violent deaths, and assorted violent and graphically depicted incidents.

Max, you're a parent. Do you really want **your** kids reading that kind of thing? Now, I'm sure you're thinking that any kid in today's modern society will see or hear much worse before s/he reaches his/her sixth birthday. But the point here is not whether they hear it, but where. Reading profanity in a children's publication legitimizes the use of profanity in a way that hearing it on the street doesn't. Likewise the depiction of casual sex. I certainly don't condone censorship. Further, I'm aware that it's a royal pain in the ass to write according to a pre-set series of standards. Still, you manage to turn out good, readable material in DICK TRACY without such a set of standards impinging on the quality. Maybe you should show a little restraint in MS. TREE as well.

I wouldn't even be concerned except that, in the comic book store here in Berkeley where I buy the magazine, it is sold off the same stand that SUPERMAN, ARCHIE and CASPER THE FRIENDLY GHOST are sold from. I know you say that MS. TREE is a mainstream comic, but you've got to admit that it's in a different class than those other books. If it was marketed more particularly for adults, I probably wouldn't be concerned.

Well, enough guilt trips about young, impressionable minds. Now to other matters such as plot. I have to admit that the initial disappointment at seeing Ms. Tree sleep with yet

another murderer sets you up for the final surprise ending quite nicely. Still, if I were you, I would call a moratorium on Michael's falling for killers. How about developing a romance between her and that state police captain who disapproves of her methods so much?

Secondly, let's not forget that Ms. Tree is in business. She can't spend all her professional time getting vengeance. Why not have her take a paid case now and then instead of contracting them all to Mike Mist?

JIM DOHERTY, Berkeley, CA

Thanks for your long letter, Jim (which I've only excerpted here - Jim, a police officer by trade, and a mystery fan by inclination, goes on for several pages discussing several Max Collins novels, as well as disagreeing with a Collins article that praised the recent I, THE JURY film adaptation).

I have a hunch that Jim - like a number of MS. TREE readers - has not widely read in the comics field in general - that he has come to MS. TREE as a mystery fan, not a comics fan. I say that to put his letter in context for comics fans, who might well be outraged at Jim's assumption that "comics are still considered a children's medium." Actually, I'm not so sure he's wrong - comics often **are** still considered a children's medium, even though they aren't inherently such.

Because MS. TREE is not a regular newstand comic book published by DC or MARVEL, and is rather a direct-distribution title, going primarily to comic-book specialty shops, Jim's objections to MS. TREE's sex and violence are pretty much beside the point. We aim at an adult audience, but acknowledge our readership probably reaches down into the early teens. Contemporary early-teenagers have become quite used to the horrors of their own junior high school (a far more frightening place than Indiana Jones' Temple of Doom) and will find in MS. TREE nothing that will turn their hair white or their moralities corrupt. I would not like a six-year-old reading the book, however, and even readers in the 11 - 12 range should be reading us only with parental guidance.

Readers who've been with us from the beginning will remember that the black-and-white ECLIPSE MAGAZINE version of MS. TREE was somewhat rougher, particularly where profanity was concerned, we acknowledged that being in an inexpensive color comic-book format would automatically bring in younger readers than our appearances in a \$3.95 black-and-white magazine had, and adjusted our style accordingly.

A controversy on the subject Jim brings up here continues to rage; what should happen if a Moral Majority type who considers comics inherently to be designed for kids should stumble across MS. TREE? Would kaka hit the fandom? Should comics aimed at an older audience be labelled "for mature readers"? What do **you** think?

Finally, to touch briefly on the other points Jim raises: references in the feature to the business side of Ms. Tree's business have been numerous. Ms. Tree is unlikely to have a romance with Captain Sam Meyers, at least in the near future, and Ms. Tree has slept with two murderers thus far - count 'em, **two**. The second MS. TREE story was designed to parallel the first, putting her through the same traumas once more - this included the trauma of the betraying lover. It's not a formula, kids: it ain't gonna happen again - or is it?





Address all letters of comment to:

SWAK

AARDVARK-VANAHEIM INC.
P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C'
KITCHENER, ONTARIO
N2G 4R2

Welcome to the letters' column for MS. TREE #10, the first of what we trust will be many issues with Aardvark-Vanaheim.

For the uninitiated, SWAK stands for "Sealed With a Kiss," and is intended to be a wry reference to the tough/tender nature of our female private eye, Ms. Michael Tree. We encourage your letters, and are in fact prepared to expand this letters section to three or even four pages, should your creative enthusiasm as scribes demand. Our regular readers will notice the heft of this issue is somewhat less than our previous, ECLIPSE-published issues, but we do plan to expand our page count in early 1985, to make room for more text and possibly an ad section.

As for the comics content of the book, we have expanded the MS. TREE feature from 18 pages to 20 - two ten-page chapters. We have also returned THE MIKE MIST MINUTE MISTERIES to its more popular 2-page format. The series of famous detective pin-ups (first by Frank Miller, then by Mike Grell) has been discontinued for the present, though JON SABLE-creator Grell will finish up with a series of Spillane pin-ups for the MS. TREE/MIKE MAUSER 3-issue mini-series soon to be published by First Comics (more about which you'll find in next month's SWAK). Also gone (actually, it departed with #7) is THE SCYTHE by Dean Mullaney and Ellis Goodson. There are fewer story pages now - but more MS. TREE and MIKE MIST pages, which judging from our previous letters-of-comment was something most of you desired.

There are other format changes, notably the absence of full-color. A-V has made its mark with black-and-white books, such as the classic CEREBUS, the classy JOURNEY and the class-favorite (around here) NEIL THE HORSE. But with NORMALMAN and CUTEY BUNNY, the Aardvark has been sticking a tentative toe into four-color. Publisher Deni Sim gave us that colorful option, but we decided (at this point) to try an experiment. You are holding the results of that experiment in your hands right now, and you know more than we do, because this column is, naturally, being written before publication (funny how that works). Anyway, artist Terry Beatty convinced writer Max Collins (me) and the A-V folks (them) to try doing a few issues in duotone, specifically using shades of orange/red over black-and-white in a manner common to European and Japanese comics. We are hoping for a unique look, here; something to give the book a further film noir-ish flavor. If you are pleased (or, for that matter, displeased) with the results, please let us know, via SWAK.

We project four (possibly five) issues using the duotone, at which point we may return to color or go to black-and-white. We haven't decided yet, and would like your thoughts on the matter. Conventional comics wisdom would have it that we will lose a good chunk of

our respectable circulation by going to black-and-white (even this duotone has been deemed risky); yet many of our readers - as well as dealers and distributors - say they have a distinct liking for Terry Beatty's art in black-and-white (possibly because MS. TREE debuted in black-and-white back in ECLIPSE MAGAZINE #1, in 1981). What do you think?

Some readers will remember the Baxter or pulp paper argument that raged not long ago in the Eclipse issues of this magazine. That argument is now settled. We are now on a high-quality pulp stock - but we cost 20 cents more than we did on Baxter! Ain't it hell?

Well, at least heck, but as I've said before in previous SWAKs, your support for this book, which is a departure from the current super-hero/fantasy trend in comics, necessitates some biting of the bullet and digging down deep in your pocket or your purse. We trust our loyal readers at \$1.50 will remain loyal readers at \$1.70 (\$2 in Canada).

Why did we make this move to A-V, you may be asking? You may have read some varying reports about this in the comics press, so let me try to set the record straight. MS. TREE began in 1981 as a one-shot six-part serial in ECLIPSE MAGAZINE. The feature was something of a surprise success - it and "Coyote" (by big-guns Marshall Rogers and Steve Englehart) were the "hit" features, according to readers. Publisher Dean Mullaney asked that we spin MS. TREE off into her own book - the format was originally going to be an ECLIPSE-type black-and-white magazine; then a CEREBUS-style black-and-white; and, finally, a full-color comic. Our first issue sold very well; subsequent issues did nicely, but sales were hurt by publishing delays between several of the issues and, of course, by the general glut of product on the market. Nonetheless, our initial agreement with Eclipse for 3 issues was extended to 9, which we delivered. Having fulfilled our contract, Terry Beatty and I began discussions for continuing MS. TREE with three major independents, among them Eclipse and A-V. There was a possibility that if we continued at Eclipse, our book would be phased out and the MS. TREE feature would shift either to ECLIPSE MONTHLY or into a "split" book; another major independent made overtures that were attractive but did not extend beyond, initially at least, a "back-up" slot for MS. TREE or at best a "split" or "shared" book. A-V, on the other hand, was anxious to continue MS. TREE in her own book without "missing a beat" between the final Eclipse issue and the first A-V.

And, so, here we are.

Before we settle in with the nice folks at A-V, however, we need to acknowledge the debt we owe to Dean and Jan Mullaney and Eclipse for giving life to MS. TREE; Dean, in particular, has been MS. TREE's best friend, biggest fan and strongest booster. We would like to dedicate this first A-V issue to him.

Had Anne mentioned it? Sure enough, there it is in ECLIPSE MAGAZINE #5. And since that time I've probably escaped from less than half as many attempts on my life as Michael has had to distract her. What we have here is a logical, reasonable excuse to keep Jason Edwards out of the plot until he's needed. That I can have no complaint with.

However, if I pick up next issue and meet Mike Junior's former wife, you can expect a long letter from me.

ERIC YARBER, St. Louis, MO

How did you know Mike Junior had been married? I was

Dear Max and Terry,

You almost got a letter of complaint from this corner. After all, how (in issue #6) could Michael not have known about Anne Tree's second husband? When I finished chapter five of this issue, I sat stunned at the idea that no mention of something as big as a second marriage would pass from Anne to the woman she was trusting her child's future to.

So I ended up grumbling through the rest of the issue until I got to the bottom of page 4 of chapter six. At that point, Michael admitted she'd forgotten Anne had mentioned it. Geez, I'd forgotten that.

The
Files
of

Ms. TREE

by Max Collins and Terry Beatty

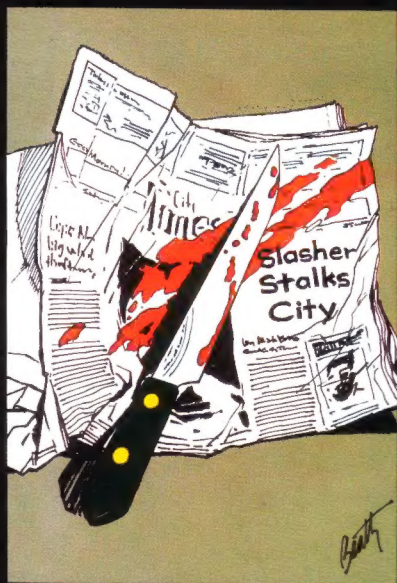
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